Jane Cable

...By...

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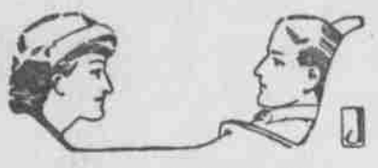

CHAPTER XXVII.

EARLY in March a great transport sailed from Manila bay laden with sick and disabled soldiers—the lame, the healthless and the mad. It was not a merry shipload, although hundreds were rejoicing in the escape from the hardships of life in the islands. Graydon Bansemer was among them, weak and distrustful of his own future, albeit a medal of honor and the prospect of an excellent position were ahead of him. His discharge was assured. He had served his country briefly, but well, and he was not loath to rest on his insignificant laurels and to respect the memory of the impulse which had driven him into service. In his heart he felt that time would make him as strong as ever, despite the ugly scar in his side. It was a question with him, however, whether time could revive the ambiton that had been smothered during the first days of despair. He looked ahead with keen inquiry, speculating on the uncertain whirl of fortune's wheel.

Jane was obduracy itself in respect to his pleadings. A certain light in her eyes had at last brought conviction to his soul. He began to fear, with a mighty pain, that she would not retreat from the stand she had taken.

She went on board with Mrs. Harbin and Ethel. There were other wives on board who had found temporary release from irksome but voluntary enlistment. Jane's resignation from the Red Cross society deprived her of the privileges which would have permitted her to see much of Graydon. They were kept separated by the transport's regulations—he was a common soldier, she of the officers' mess. The restrictions were cruel and relentless. They saw but little of one another during the thirty days, but their thoughts were busy with the days to come. Graydon grew stronger and more confident as the ship forged nearer to the Golden Gate, Jane more wistful and resigned to the new purpose which was to give life another coloring, if possible. They were but one day out from San Francisco when he found the opportunity to converse with her as she passed through the quarters of the luckless ones.

"Jane, I won't take no for an answer this time," he whispered eagerly. "You must consent. Do you want to ruin both of our lives?"

"Why will you persist, Graydon? You know I cannot"—

"You can. Consider me as well as yourself. I want you. Isn't that enough? You can't ask for more love than I will give. Tomorrow we'll be on shore. I have many things to do before I am liberty to go my way. Won't you wait for me? It won't be long. We can be married in San Francisco. Mr. and Mrs. Cable are to meet you. Tell them, dearest, that you want to go home with me. The home won't be in Chicago, but it will be home just the same."

"Dear Graydon, I am sorry, I am heartsick, but I cannot, I dare not."

Graydon Bansemer was a man as well as a lover. He gave utterance to a perfectly manlike expression, coming from the bottom of his tried soul:

"It's d——d nonsense, Jane!" He said it so feelingly that she smiled even as she shook her head and moved away. "I'll see you tomorrow on shore?" he called, repentant and anxious.

"Yes!"

The next day they landed. Graydon waved an anxious farewell to her as he was hurried off with the lame, the halt and the blind. He saw David Cable and his wife on the pier, and in spite of himself he could not repel an eager, half fearful glance through the crowd of faces. Although he did not expect his father to meet him, he dreaded the thought that he might be there, after all. To his surprise, as he stood waiting with his comrades he saw David Cable turn suddenly and after a moment's hesitation wave his hand to him, the utmost friendship in his now haggard face. His heart thumped joyously at this sign of amity.

As the soldiers moved away Cable paused and looked after him, a grim though compassionate expression in his eyes. He and Jane were ready to confront the customs officers.

"I wonder if he knows about his father," mused he. Jane caught her breath and looked at him with something like terror in her eyes. He abruptly changed the subject, deploring his lapse into the past from which they were trying to shield her.

The following morning Graydon received a note from Cable, a frank but carefully worded message, in which he was invited to take the trip east in the private car of the president of the Pacific, Lakes and Atlantic. Mrs. Cable joined her husband in the invitation. One of the sore spots in Graydon's conscience was healed by this exhibition of kindness. Morever, Cable stated that his party would delay departure until Graydon's papers were passed upon and he was free from red tape restrictions.

The young man on landing sent telegrams to his father and Elias Droom, the latter having asked him to notify him as soon as he reached San Francisco. Graydon was not a little puzzled by the fact that the old clerk seemed strangely at variance with his father in respect to the future. In both telegrams he announced that he would start east as soon as possible.

There was a letter from Droom awaiting him at headquarters. It was brief, but it specifically urged him to accept the place proposed by Mr. Clegg and reiterated his pressing command to the young man to stop for a few days in Chicago. In broad and characteristically uncouth sentences he assured him that while the city held no grudge against him and that the young men would welcome him with open arms—his groundless fears to the contrary—he would advise him to choose New York. There was one rather sentimental allusion to "old Broadway" and another to "Grenitch," as he wrote it. In conclusion, he asked him to come to the office, which was still in the U—— building, adding that if he wished to avoid the newspaper men he could find seclusion at the old rooms in Wells street. "Your father," he said, "has given up his apartment and has taken lodgings. I doubt very much if he will be willing to share them with you, in view of the position he has assumed in regard to your future, although he says you may always call upon him for pecuniary assistance." A draft for $500 was inclosed with the letter.

Graydon was relieved to find that there would be no irksome delay attending his official discharge. When he walked out a "free man," as he called it, a gentlemanly pension attorney locked arms with him and hung on like a leech until the irritated soldier shook him off with less consideration than vigor.

He went directly to the Palace hotel, where he knew the Cables were stopping. David Cable came down in response to his card. The two men shook hands, each eying the other inquiringly for an instant.

"I want you to understand, Graydon, that I am your friend. Nothing has altered my esteem for you."

"Thank you, Mr. Cable. I hardly expected it."

"I don't see why, my boy. But we'll let all that pass. Mrs. Cable wants to see you."

"Before we go any farther I want to make myself clear to you. I still hope to marry Jane. She says she cannot become my wife. You understand why, sir. I only want to tell you that her objections are not objections to me. She is Jane, and I love her, sir, because she is."

"I hope you can win her over, Graydon. She seems determined, however, and she is unhappy. You can't blame her, either. If there were base or common blood in her, it wouldn't make much difference to her pride. But she's made of other material. She's serious about it, and I am sensible enough to get her point of view. She wouldn't want to marry you with the prospect of an eternal shadow that neither of you could get off of your minds. I sometimes wish that I knew who were her parents."

"It doesn't matter, so far as I am concerned."

"I know, my boy. You'll never know how it hurt me to find that I had no daughter. It hurts her worse a thousandfold to learn that she has no mother. I trust it may not happen that you will lose her as a wife."

"If I really thought I couldn't win her, sir, it would ruin my ambition in life. She loves me, I'm sure."

"By the way, Clegg tells me he has offered you the New York office. It is a splendid chance for you. You will take it, of course."

"I expect to talk it over with Mr. Clegg when I get to Chicago."

"Come up to our apartments. Oh, pardon me, Graydon, I want to ask you if you have sufficient money to carry you through? I know the pay of a private is not great."

"Thank you. I have saved nearly all of it. My father has sent me a draft for five hundred. I don't expect to use it, of course."

"Your father?" asked Cable, with a quick, searching look.

"And then I did save something in Chicago, strange as it may seem," said Bansemer, with a smile. "I have a few of your 5 per cents. I trust the road is all right."

The Cables left San Francisco on the following day, accompanied by the Harbins and Graydon Bansemer. There was no mistaking the joy which lay under restraint in the faces and attitude of the Cables. David Cable had grown younger and less gray, it seemed, and his wife was glowing with a new and subdued happiness. Graydon, sitting with the excited Ethel, who was rejoicing in the prospect of New York and the other young man, studied the faces of the three people who sat at the other end of the coach.

Time had wrought its penalties. Cable was thin and his face had lost its virility, but not its power. His eyes never left the face of Jane, who was talking in an earnest, impassioned manner, as was her wont in these days. Frances Cable's face was a study in transition. She had lost the color and vivacity of a year ago, although the change was not apparent to the casual observer. Graydon could see that she had suffered in many ways. The keen, eager appeal for appreciation was gone from her eyes; in its stead was the appeal for love and contentedness. Happiness, now struggling against the smarting of a sober pain, was giving a sweetness to her eyes that had been lost in the ambitious glitter of other days. Ethel bored him, a most unusual condition. He longed to be under the tender, quieting influence at the opposite end of the car. He even resented his temporary exile.

"Jane," Cable was saying with gentle insistence, "it is not just to him. He loves you, and you are not doing the right thing by him."

"You'll find I am right in the end," she said stubbornly.

"I can't bear the thought of your going out as a trained nurse, dear," protested Frances Cable. "There is no necessity. You can have the best of homes and in any place you like. Why waste your life in"—

"Waste, mother? It would be wasting my life if I did not find an occupation for it. I can't be idle. I can't exist forever in your love and devotion."

"Good Lord, child, don't be foolish!" exclaimed Cable. "That hurts me more than you think. Everything we have is yours."

"I'm sorry I said it, daddy. I did not mean it in that way. It isn't the money, you know, and it isn't the home, either. No; you must let me choose my own way of living the rest of my life. I came from a foundling hospital. A good and tender nurse found me there and gave me the happiest years of my life. I shall go back there and give the rest of my years to children who are less fortunate than I was. I want to help them, mother. Just as you did—only it is different with me."

"You'll see it differently some day," said Mrs. Cable earnestly.

"I don't object to your helping the foundlings, Jane," said Cable, "but I don't see why you have to be a nurse to do it. Other women support such causes, and not as nurses, either. It's"—

"It's my way, daddy, that's all," she said firmly.

"Then why, in the name of heaven, were you so unkind as to keep that poor boy over there alive when he might have died and ended his misery? You nursed him back to life only to give him a wound that cannot be healed. You would ruin his life, Jane. Is it fair? I'm uncouth and hard in many ways—I had a hard, unkind beginning—but I really believe I've got more heart in me than you have."

"David!" exclaimed his wife. Jane looked at the exasperated man in surprise.

"Now, here's what I intend you to do: You owe me something for the love that I give to you; you owe Graydon something for keeping him from dying. If you want to go into the nursing business, all right. But I'm

"Good Lord, child, don't be foolish!" exclaimed Cable.

going to demand some of your devotion for my own sake before that time comes. I've loved you all of your life"—

"And I've loved you, daddy," she gasped.

"And I'm going to ask you to begin your nursing career by attending to me. I'm sick for want of your love. I'm giving up business for the sake of enjoying it unrestrained. Your mother and I expect it. We are going abroad for our health, and we are going to take you with us. Right now is where you begin your career as a nurse. You've got to begin by taking care of the love that is sick and miserable. We want it to live, my dear. Now, I want a direct decision—at once: Will you take charge of two patients on a long contemplated trip in search of love and rest—wages paid in advance?"

She looked at him, white faced and stunned. He was putting it before her fluently and in a new light. She saw what it was that he considered that she owed to them—the love of a daughter, after all.

An hour later she stood with Gray- on the rear platform of the car. Je was trying to talk calmly of the country through which they were rushing, and she was looking pensively down the rails that slipped out behind them.

"We'll be in Chicago in three days," he remarked.

"Graydon, I have decided to go abroad for five or six months before starting upon my work. They want me so much, you see," she said, her voice a trifle uncertain.

"Something loose about your testimony, I believe, wasn't there?"

"Oh, the whole thing doesn't amount to a whoop. I'm trying to get Rosie another job. She oughtn't to write in there with that guy."

"Well, you're twenty-one. Why don't you open an office of your own? Your mother's got plenty of money. She can buy you a library and a sign, and that is all a young lawyer needs in Chicago."

"Mother wants me to run for alderman in our ward next spring. I'll be able to vote at that election."

"You've got as much right in the council as some others, I suppose."

"Sure. Mother owns property. The west side ought to be as well represented as the north side. Property interests is what we need in the council. That's"—

"I don't care to hear a political speech, boy. Are you busy this afternoon?"

"No. I wouldn't be here if I was."

"Then get up there and hand those books down to me. Nobody loafs in this office today."

"Well, doggone, if that isn't the limit! All right. Don't get mad. I'll do it." The young gentleman leisurely ascended to the top of the stepladder and fell into line under the lash.

"Young Mr. Graydon Bansemer will be here this afternoon," said Droom. "I want to get things cleaned up a bit beforehand."

"How does he feel about his father?"

"He doesn't know about him, I'm afraid."

"Gee! Well, it'll jar him a bit, won't it?"

The office door was opened suddenly, and a tall young man strode into the room, only to stop aghast at the sight before him. Droom's lank figure swayed uncertainly and his eyes wavered.

"What's all this?" cried Graydon, dropping his bag and coming toward the old man, his hand outstretched. Droom's clammy fingers rested lifelessly in the warm clasp.

"How are you, Graydon? I'm—I'm very glad to see you. You are looking well. Oh, this? We—we are moving," said the old man. The helpers looked on with interest. "Come into the back office. It isn't so torn up. I didn't expect you so soon. They said it was twenty-four hours late. Well, well, how are you, my boy?"

"I'm quite well again, Elias. Hard siege of it, I tell you. Moving, eh? What's that for?"

"Never mind those books, Eddie. Thank you for helping me. Come in some other time. You fellows—I mean you—pack the rest of these, and then I'll tell you what to do next. Come in, Graydon."

Eddie Deever took his departure, deeply insulted because he had not been introduced to the newcomer. Graydon, somewhat bewildered, followed Droom into his father's consultation room. He looked around inquiringly.

"Where is father? I telegraphed to him."

An incomprehensible grin came into Droom's face. He twirled the umbrella in his fingers a moment before replying. His glance at the closed door was no more significant than his lowered tones.

"It didn't go very well with him, Graydon. He isn't here any more."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean the trial. There was a trial, you see. Haven't you heard anything?"

"Trial? He—he was arrested?" came numbly from the young man's lips.

"I can't mince matters, Graydon. I'll get it over as quickly as possible. Your father was tried for blackmail and was convicted. He is in—he's in the penitentiary."

The son's face became absolutely bloodless. His eyes were full of comprehension and horror, and his body stiffened as if he were turning to stone. The word penitentiary fell slowly, mechanically, from his lips. He looked into Droom's eyes, hoping it might be a joke of the calloused old clerk.

"You—it—it can't be true," he murmured, his trembling hands going to his temples.

"Yes, my boy, it is true. I didn't write to you about it because I wanted to put it off as long as I could. It's for five years."

"God!" burst from the wretched son. A wave of shame and grief sent the tears flooding to his eyes. "Poor old dad!" He turned and walked to the window, his shoulders heaving. Droom stood silent for a long time, watching Bansemer's son, pity and triumph in his face.

"Do you want to hear about it?" he asked at last. Graydon's head was bent in assent.

"It came the day after you left Chicago with the recruits. I knew you would not read the newspapers. So did he. Harbert swore out the papers, and he was arrested here in this office. I believe he would have killed himself if he had been given time. His revolver was—er—not loaded. Before the officers came he discharged me. I was at liberty to go or to testify against him. I did neither. Of course I was arrested, but they could only prove that I was a clerk who knew absolutely nothing about the inside workings of the office. I offered to go on his bond, but he would not have me. He made some arrangement through his attorney, and bail was secured. In spite of the fact that he was charged with crime he insisted on keeping these offices and trying to do business. It wasn't because he needed money, Graydon, but because he wanted to lead an honest life, he said. He has a great deal of money, let me tell you. The grand jury indicted him last spring, but the trial did not come up until last month, nearly a year later, so swift is justice in this city. In the meantime I saw but little of him. I was working on an invention, and, besides, there were detectives watching every movement I made. I stuck close to my rooms. By the way,

"I wish I could have some power to persuade you," he said. Changing his tone to one of brisk interest, he went on. "It is right, dear. It will do you great good, and it will be a joy to them. I'll miss you."

"And I shall miss you, Graydon," she said, her eyes very solemn and wistful.

"Won't you—won't you give me the promise I want, Janet?" he asked eagerly. She placed her hand upon his and shook her head.

"Won't you be good to me, Graydon? Don't make it so hard for me. Please, please don't tell me again that you love me."

(To Be Continued)